

Forensic Science Under Siege. The Challenges of Forensic Laboratories and the Medico-Legal Investigation System, Kelly M. Pyrek. Elsevier Academic Press (2007). 568 pp., Paperback, \$ 59.95, ISBN: 0-12-370861-3

The subtitle of this gargantuan 568 page text “The Challenges of Forensic Laboratories and the Medico-Legal Investigation System” is a less dramatic, but more accurate description of the contents than the sensationalist “Forensic Science Under Siege” headline. The writings of the author, Kelly Pyrek, should not be a revelation for anyone working within forensic science or pathology, but they may provide some comfort – universally, centres are under resourced and have a backlog. She explains, in a sympathetic and understanding manner, that there are shortcomings to forensic science and death investigation. The emphasis is not on rogue investigators who have deliberately misled the courts (although some are cited), but on limitations of the systems of investigation and justice. A range of areas are covered, including the lack of proven science in forensic techniques (fingerprint matching), misinterpretation of evidence by juries (DNA statistics), the controversy of admissibility of expert evidence (Frye vs Daubert), and the ‘CSI effect’. Much of the real side of forensic investigation is presented to counter the widely prevalent fiction from ‘Quincy’ to ‘Crossing Jordan’. Forensic death investigation (forensic pathology) is regarded separately and specifically, as it has its own par-

ticular issues: for example, the argument of Coroner vs Medical Examiner systems. It will be apparent from the above that the book’s discussions pertain to America; nonetheless, most of the issues are widely relevant. Although the writer is not from the forensic world, she has a background of forensic related publications and has interviewed many established forensic figures for this book. The volume is wordy and could be condensed, but it covers the subject matter in depth: including details such as recommended autopsy workloads. I can recommend this text to any member of the public with an interest in forensics; those considering entering the forensic world; legal practitioners who apply the findings of any of the forensic fields, and the press considering castigating the ‘glamorous’ world of forensics. Instead of taking the easy money of forensic bashing, this book exposes the field for verging on the dowdy, but doing its best despite being often misunderstood, misrepresented, under provisioned, requiring clear unifying steering and suffering a lack of government support. At the end, strategies for pulling forensics out of the mire are reviewed, but there is no silver lining.

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